DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 025 379 RE 001 353

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Waco Head Start Program

Pub Date Apr 68
Note- 16p.; Paper presented at International Reading Association conference, Boston, Mass., April 24-27, 1968.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.90
Descriptors- *Elementary Education, *Federal Programs, Field Trips, Health Services, Language Development, Lunch Programs, Mathematics, Parent Participation, *Program Design, Science Activities, Social Studies, *Socioeconomic Background

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 led to the formation of three separate Head Start Programs in Waco, Texas. The first year, 1,500 children were involved. Of these, 40 percent were Negro, 30 percent Latin American, and 30 percent white. All teachers received a week of preparatory study at the University of Texas. The program involved four areas of concentration--(1) health services, (2) two meals daily, (3) education emphasizing discovery and experimentation, (4) parental involvement and social services. The educational program ranged from planned and spontaneous dramatic play and field trips to social studies and math. The children were encouraged to talk about their work or play throughout the day. Parents were invited to participate in school activities, about 85 percent of the parents attended open house. The success of the Head Start Programs led to the establishment of day care centers for 3 to 5 year-old-children. Head Start made the curriculum of the first and second grades in the Waco Public Schools more flexible, especially in the area of discovery and experimentation. (WL)

IRA, Boston, 1968

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WACO HEAD START PROGRAM

Symposium III In-Service Education in Reading
12C The Role of Preschool Instruction

INTRODUCTION

For many years, educators and governmental leaders have realized the importance of early childhood education. Yet, in this decade, there has been a greater manifestation of interest and a more tremendous emphasis on the education of the pre-school child than ever before in the history of our nation. With the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, opportunities for a new life opened up for many children in Waco, as well as for many other children in the nation.

In Waco there are three separate Head Start Programs. They are sponsored by the Waco Independent School District, the La Vega Independent School District, and the McLennan County Department of Education.

SELECTION OF THE PUPILS

In June, 1965, when the Head Start Program was launched, approximately 1500 Waco children, many frightened, nervous, and perplexed, appeared at one of sixteen designated schools. Approximately forty per cent were Negro, thirty per cent Latin American and thirty per cent White. Because of less financial assistance from the Office of Economic Opportunity, the number of children in the program has decreased each succeeding year.

From a city of Waco survey, made the previous year, it was relatively easy to determine which children were acceptable for the program. Letters were sent to the eligible parents inviting their children to participate in the first Head Start Program. Briefly the letters explained the purposes of Head Start and the benefits the children were expected to receive. Many of the skeptical parents, feeling that outsiders were meddling in their private affairs, did not respond to the letters. In a recruitment to receive the desired number of participants, there were meetings with the parents at designated schools and also home visitations were made. After the first year, it was not necessary to sell the idea of the program to the parents, for they were eager to enroll their children.

PERSONNEL

For each of the three Head Start Programs there was a director, an assistant director, a pediatrition, dentists, a Home Demonstration Agent, and two Waco school nurses. Also there were about thirty-one dedicated and enthusiastic teachers, mostly regular first grade Waco school teachers, assisted by about thirty-one teacher aides. Thus there were approximately one teacher and one teacher aide to seventeen pupils. Before the teachers began work, they spent a week in an intensive education session at the University of Texas in Austin, a program sponsored by the Office of Economic Opprotunity.

After several talks before high school and civic groups, approximately 325 people volunteered their services. Some women in Regis Retirement Home made dolls, doll clothes, puppets, and many other objects that were used by the children and greatly appreciated. Grandfathers also found ways in which they could help. One day a group of high school boys presented a musical program for the entertainment of the children. Deeply impressed by the interest of the children, the boys returned several days to assist with the musical and physical activities.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAM

The program contained four major components: 1. health services, including medical examination, sight and hearing test, dental examinations, immunizations; 2. nutritional supplementation which included two full meals each day; 3. education, with emphasis placed on discovery and experiemntation; 4. parent involvement and social services.

HEALTH SERVICES

During the first three weeks each year, each child was given a thorough medical examination and later a dental examination. To hear about the physical condition of their child, the parents were invited to be present for the examination. For those children who needed immediate dental or medical attention, the following types of treatment were given according to their specific needs--treatment for visual difficulties, for heart ailments, for hernias, for defective throats, and for anemia. Glasses were provided, attention was given to hearing, and many were immunized against measles.

MEALS AND GROOMING

Each day two meals were served--breakfast and lunch. Meal time offered opportunity for acquiring information about foods and for learning many social skills. For one thing, they learned to wait patiently until all were ready to eat. They learned to speak quietly and pleasantly as they ate. They learned the names of different foods. Soon they were classifying fruits, vegetables, meats, and desserts.

They learned proper utensils to use. One girl could not use her spoon. In fact, she inverted it; consequently, all the food dropped off. After someone showed her how to hold the spoon, she did not have eye-hand coordination enough to get the food to her mouth. In her disgust she threw the spoon against the wall.

After breakfast each morning, there was time provided for grooming. Each child was given a kit which he highly treasured. In the kit were mirror, comb, tooth brush, tooth paste, soap, and emory boards. A few of the children were thrilled hilariously as they saw themselves in a mirror for the first time. After breakfast, they washed their hands, brushed their teeth, and combed their hair. Instructions and demonstrations were given on the proper way to brush teeth, how to care for the hair, and other hygenic principles. The grooming period helped them develop a feeling of worth and dignity.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The program, which lasted from 8:00 A.M. till 1:00 P.M., was flexible with opportunities for meeting individual and group needs instantaneously as situations arose. The teachers were alert for momentous opportunities for children to discover and experiment during meaningful situations when the children were involved and curious.

Dramatic Play (Planned and Spontaneous)

There was a never ending fascination for the girls as they donned old clothes and glittering jewelry. They played at visiting others and having parties and picnics. In their play they carried on conversations and served refreshments. Thus there were many opportunities for practicing simple courtesies that needed to be learned and reinforced. They learned to say "Thank you," "I'm sorry," "Excuse me," and other useful courteous expressions.

Sometimes, however, they preferred to dress their dolls or puppets and allow them to go visiting, make purchases, go to parties and

picnics. They became aware that there were appropriate clothes for certain occasions. They also played at cooking, taking care of the children, and other things necessary in caring for a home.

While the girls were extremely interested in old clothes and jewelry, the boys were interested in trucks, trains, and building blocks. They also made imaginary purchases in the country store area. In their role playing, they became the doctor, dentist, fireman, policeman, and bus driver. Both boys and girls enjoyed dramatizing "The Three Bears" and other stories and nursery rhymes.

Science

At the beginning many displayed an appalling lack of everyday knowledge. Some had grown up within a two block radius of their homes and could not name the most common objects. However, with proper motivation and guidance, they became fascinated by the many wonders of nature. The teachers, realizing that many firsthand experiences should precede later book learning, allowed them many opportunities to make discoveries of the world about them. The teachers aided the children in observing and interpreting many things that would otherwise have gone unnoticed.

For instance, on their walks around the neighborhood, the children gathered and learned specific names of flowers, leaves, rocks, and many other available objects. Later going into more detail, the teacher pointed out such things as the different parts of the plants and flowers. Also the children began to notice the difference in the fragrance of the flowers. They also talked about the fruit or nuts some of the trees produced. They cracked nuts to see the meat inside.

Seeds of different kinds started a discussion of how things grow. Daily they watched peas, beans, and corn which they had planted in pots. They delighted to feed birds crumbs and seeds. They observed ants, wasps, bees, and other insects.

When they made their trip to the zoos, farms, and dairies, the teacher called attention to the types of food the aminals ate. What a joy the children experienced as they rode horses! Too, they watched intently as a cow was being milked. Also many animals--ducks, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, and other small animals--were brought into the classroom. The children helped with the feeding and care of the animals and plants, and thus their knowledge grew.

Day by day they observed the weather, and as the occasion presented itself, felt dew on the grass, examined hail stones, observed clouds and rain, caught rain water in a bucket and watched it evaporate. On their visit to the lake, they threw pieces of wood on the water and watched them float. The rocks did not float. Some asked, "Why?", and they were given an answer. They saw thermometers and barometers, and experienced the thrill of seeing things enlarge through a magnifying glass.

Coordination (Outside Activity)

During a part of every day the students enjoyed physical activity, which provided relaxation and aided in better motor coordination. Some of the activities engaged in were jumping rope, bouncing and catching rubber balls, playing games requiring running, jumping, and leaping. Also they rode tricycles and played with toy wagons and toy trucks. An activity that had ceaseless fascination for the boys,

and for some of the girls, was rolling rubber tires. Also the children delighted in playing in sand boxes.

Language Development

At first, the shy, timid children were hesitant to talk, even to answer a question which could be answered in one or two words. The teachers, knowing that the children needed to talk, provided frequent and varied opportunities for them to do so. As the pupils arrived each morning, the teachers greeted them and attempted to engage them in friendly chats. Also they encouraged the children to greet each other and to talk together about things which interested them. During the breakfast and lunch periods, teachers started conversations which they thought would be interesting to the children. The work-play period was another opportunity for conversations. Throughout the day, the pupils were encouraged to talk about their work or play and to ask and answer questions.

The children told of their personal experiences. They engaged in "Show and Tell." They talked about things they saw or heard on various trips. After seeing films and filmstrips they chatted enthusiastically about what they saw and heard and felt. They were overwhelmed with joy as they saw the movie Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs at a Waco theater.

With their toy telephones they talked to each other, to the teachers, and carried on imaginary conversations with their mothers or friends. To help the children develop interest in books, stories, and poetry, the teachers provided many attractive and interesting

books for the children to look at and handle. Daily the teacher read interesting stories to the children, who enjoyed discussing and retelling them. What a joy it was for the children to dress to represent different characters and dramatize stories and nursery rhymes! They listened to records and tape recordings and felt the magic of hearing their conversations on the tape recorder.

Children added many words to their vocabularies as they learned the names of many things as they saw them. From films, filmstrips, and objects which teachers and pupils brought into the room, they learned the meanings of other words. Also from hearing stories read, sometimes with flannel board pictures representing words in the stories, they learned words. A Sears catalog proved captivating to the children. They spend hours looking at it and discussing what they saw. The catalog aided tremendously in adding to their store of words.

Mathematics

Many opportunities arose daily for the use of numbers and for the development of mathematical concepts. There were opportunities for counting; such as, count the boys, the girls, the chairs, the cookies. Also in games, teachers helped them count the number of times they jumped rope, threw the ball through the hoop, or bounced the ball. They were given instructions to skip or jump three times, two, or five times.

After reading such stories as "The Three Little Pigs" or "The Three Bears", the children drew the three pigs or the three bears. The teacher pointed to the calendar as she told them what day it was,

as Monday, June 5. There were opportunities for them to see real money and to learn the names of pieces of money.

Mathematical concepts were developed through weighing the children and telling them how much they weighed, and in comparing their weights with others. Also, the children were measured and were told their height in feet and inches. Charts were kept comparing their gains. They handled rulers and yardsticks.

As they were drinking a soft drink, mention was made that the bottle held six or ten ounces. Opportunities presented themsleves for the children to see and handle food or drink in pint, quart, or gallon containers. As they were eating, sometimes there were opportunities to mention such fractions as one-half of an apple, or one-fourth of a pie.

There were opportunities to help them develop concepts of geometrical shapes as they played with building blocks.. Some of them learned to call the shapes by names as squares, rectangles, circles, cylinders, triangles, or tetrahedrons.

The children were entranced in watching the hands move on clocks and watches, and teachers would call attention to the location of the hands of the clock at eight o'clock "when we come to school" or twelve o'clock "lunch time."

As they played with toys and as they compared objects, they gained some understanding of mathematical terms as <u>big</u> and <u>little</u>, <u>high</u> and <u>low</u>, <u>late</u> and <u>early</u>, <u>first</u> and <u>last</u>, <u>longer than</u> and <u>shorter than</u>, and many others.

Teachers found opportunities to talk about sets--sets of dishes, of dominoes, of blocks. Comparisions were sometimes made between sets while counting the cookies and the children to see if there were enough cookies for each child to have one.

The teachers helped the children learn to recognize the numerals. Also the teachers pointed out the numerals on a number line.

Social Studies

For eight weeks the youngsters were encouraged to learn to work and play with others and to develop a positive and friendly attitude toward people outside their immediate families. Many learned for the first time that people outside their homes were interested in them and cared for them. They experienced kindness, recognition, and acceptance by others. One way teachers aided children in the development of social skills was to encourage them to choose partners for walks, for play and games, and for many other occasions.

They were helped to share toys, playground equipment, and work materials. They learned to share in doing assigned responsibilities, such as caring for animals and plants.

Photographs of the children in life situations made them feel important. Intriguing posters were made using the photographs. Also children marveled when they saw themselves working and playing together in a film, which was made.

To help children discover the world about them and to aid in their social growth and development, many activities were planned. As has been mentioned, the excursions, some by buses, and some on foot, advanced their knowledge of community life.

After a few days browsing through many attractive books, the children were asking for the teachers to read to them about the first Thanksgiving, or about boats, trains, cars, rockets, and other things. The children saw pictures of President Lyndon Johnson and his family, of other presidents, of the Capitol of the United States, and of the White House. There were also pictures pertaining to many subjects available for the children to look at and discuss. They repeated the Pledge of Allegiance. They saw the flags of the United States and of Texas. They talked about the colors in the flag and what the flag represents. They stood respectfully as "The Star Spangled Banner" was being played or sung.

Policemen, firemen, doctors, dentists, nurses, and many other community workers explained how they might be of help to the children and to the community. The children were enthralled at the different apparel and listened intently as the people related some of their experiences. The safety of the individual, or helping the children learn to take care of themselves, was emphasized throughout the program. Policemen discussed traffic signals and crossing the street safely; doctors discussed poisons, safe play, and clean foods.

Creative Arts

The children were given some time each day in acceptable self-expression through the creative arts. Artistic expression was a means of conveying their feelings and ideas to others. This means of communication seemed both satisfying and relaxing and served, too, to give them a proper self image. Teachers helped the children to become

aware of colors and to learn the names of colors. Children mixed colors and were amazed at the new colors.

They became aware of the texture of materials--wood, paper, cloth, plastic, and others. Also they molded with clay, play dough, and plasticene, making many objects. They painted with tempera paints and with crayons. Finger painting always provided a thrill.

The children delighted in rhythms, sounds of music, singing and movement. They sang nursery rhymes and other tunes. As they worked, they were allowed to hum or sing quietly. As they listened to recorded music, they clapped their hands or patted rhythmically, fast and slow, heavy and droopy, briskly or merrily, depending on the music. At other times, they swayed, rocked, reached, twisted, or turned in place. At times they chugged like a train, zoomed like an airplane, or waddled like ducks. They pretended to be falling leaves or snowdrops, or moving clouds. They played musical games as "London Bridge is Falling Down" or "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush." They beat their drums made from oatmeal boxes.

EDUCATION OF PARENTS

From the beginning of the program, continued meetings were held with the parents in an effort to encourage and teach them so that they, in turn, could help their children make more permanent the speech, common courtesies, and other knowledges and skills learned at school. Also instructions were given to help them provide for their children more stimulating experiences at home. The McClennan County Home Demonstration Agent gave instructions to the parents about balanced meals and other information necessary to help their children

maintain good health. The fathers became interested in hearing discussions on such topics as buying groceries on a limited income and other things concerning family budgeting and the discipline of the children. Through their work and social relationships with the directors and other staff workers, teacher aides and volunteer workers received inspiration and personal enhancement. Also they learned acceptable social amenities and knowledge on many subjects which they translated into more desirable living conditions for their families at home.

Too, parents participated through the organization of councils. For these meetings parents organized and planned the program. They felt a great responsibility for interesting other parents in the activities of the council. Also they greeted the parents and served refreshments at the meetings. Their acceptance of responsibility aided them in developing a sense of pride in the meetings. Soon they spoke of the program as "our" program. One stumbling block, however, was lack of adequate communication, because many parents spoke only Spanish. Thus, the meetings were held in English, and, by the use of an interpreter, also in Spanish. The president and vice-president of each council became members of a Central Advisory Committee, where they had a direct voice in planning for the over all Head Start Program and, at the same time, they experienced the problems of the program.

Each year at the conclusion of the summer programs there was an Open House with 85 to 90 per cent of the parents in attendance. Here parents reveled in finger paintings, rhythms, in serving refreshments, and in explaining the Head Start Program.

CONTINUING HEAD START

Following two summers of Waco Head Start, the personnel involved stated that they believed the program had been successful. The directors reported that the number of failures at the end of the first grade in public schools was reduced. Teachers in the public schools who were teaching the children who participated in Head Start responded to questionnaires by saying that their classes could follow directions more accurately, could communicate more fluently, and were more curious and attentive than their classes before Head Start.

Those teachers working in the Head Start Program noted that many of the children were changed individuals at the end of only eight weeks. Many had changed from shy and timid to confident, enthusiastic, and friendly children. There was a greater than average weight increase. In many ways the children had improved.

The flexibility of the program had its effect on the curriculum of the first and second grades in the Waco Public Schools, allowing more discovery and experimentation. Also the success of the summer Head Start Program led to the establishment of four Day Care, or continuing Head Start Programs. The first two were opened in August, 1966, and two more in August, 1967. These Day Care Centers, which provide for children three to five years of age, are now in operation the entire year. While the parents work, Day Care offers a place for the pre-school children to live and learn. There is an attempt to provide for children what would be provided in a good wholesome home environment.

In general, the program is similar in many respects to that of the Summer Head Start Programs previously described. Since Day Care involves younger children, the instructional program is less complicated, but equally exciting. The children converse; listen to music; see films and filmstrips; hear stories; engage in singing, dramatizations, finger plays, choral speaking; and engage in countless other activities. Also they learn such simple things as putting their shoes on the right feet and buttoning their clothes.

One feature of Day Care that is greatly appreciated is that the teacher aides participate in a course offered to them without cost. The course is taught by a professor from Texas Woman's University in Denton. Another course offered from the same university is for the regular teachers and directors. These people do pay tuition and they receive university credit. Also many of the parents of the Day Care pupils are learning in adult education classes.

Much is being attempted through Operation Head Start in Waco, and surely many lasting and beneficial improvements are being made.